

COMMISSIONERS APPROVAL

GRANDSTAFF *CJ*

ROKOSCH

THOMPSON *AT*

CHILCOTT *gr*

DRISCOLL *KD*

PLETTENBERG (Clerk & Recorder)

Members Present.....Commissioner Carlotta
Grandstaff, Commissioner Jim Rokosch, Commissioner Alan Thompson, Commissioner
Greg Chilcott and Commissioner Kathleen Driscoll

Date.....May 28, 2008

Minutes.....Beth Perkins

► The Board met for an interview with Board of Adjustments applicant Carey Lish Jr.

► The Board met for a discussion with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on farmland of local importance. Present were Planner Renee Lemon, Neal Svendsen, Jay Scotland and Beth Rowley from NRCS.

Renee introduced the team from NRCS to the Board and stated they are invited here to give a presentation on farmland of local importance.

Jay presented 1959 soil survey by the soil conservation service to the Board and discussed how the soils haven't changed but the needs of the users have. He stated the old survey no longer meets NRCS standards.

The Eastside and Westside soils differ greatly due to source parent materials. The Westside is primarily coarse glacial outwash materials. The Eastside is much more diverse. Jay discussed parent materials and landforms. He explained the different soil located in the floodplains, floodplain steps, terraces and inset fans, fan remnants, bedrock-controlled areas, glacial outwash fans, glacial moraines. Jay stated the best kind of soil is in the terraces and inset fans. He stated none of the soils on the west side of the valley would be of prime or local importance other than pasture.

Commissioner Rokosch asked about slope of 15% and if they include characteristics of hydrous soils. Jay replied they can differentiate it from an irrigation system. Neal stated every polygon cannot be its own aggregate. Neal stated they have a scientific

classification order starting with 12 and working down to about 25,000 different classifications.

Neal discussed the difference with farmland classification as identifying the location and extent of the most suitable land for producing food, feed, fiber, forage and oilseed crops. It is useful in the management of the resource base that supports the productive capacity of American agriculture. The National system of land classification is defined in the Federal Register. Each soil survey map unit has a farmland designation.

Soil Map Unit Farmland Designations are prime farmland, prime farmland but irrigated, farmland of statewide importance, and farmland of local importance.

Prime farmland is land with the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing crop. Prime Farmland, if irrigated has the same criteria as Prime Farmland, but rainfall is limited, needs dependable irrigation supply, and if a field is classified as prime farmland if irrigated but it is not irrigated the classification is farmland of statewide importance. Farmland of State Importance is not quite as good as prime but still produces high crop yields. Often, few soils, topographical, or climatic properties out the prime criteria.

Farmland of Local Importance some areas have concern for additional farmlands for the production of food, feed, fiber and forage. It is not identified as having national or statewide importance, but is considered important locally. It is identified by local agencies concerned, typically the local conservation district. Local agency would define the criteria to be used which are typically based on minimum yield potentials. 11 counties in western Montana have identified farmland of local importance. Those counties are Lake, Mineral, Missoula, Ravalli, Sanders, Beaverhead, Gallatin, Lewis and Clark, Madison, Stillwater, and Sweet Grass. There are currently none in eastern Montana. The main reason NRCS and counties developed farmland of local importance was to make more land eligible for the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program.

Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program joins state, tribal, or non-governmental organizations to acquire conservation easements. NRCS can provide up to 50% of the fair market easement value. Part of the eligibility requirement is the land must contain at least 50% prime, unique statewide or local importance.

Farmland of Unique Importance is land other than prime farmland that is used for the production of specific high value food. It is used or could be used, for a specific high-value food or fiber crop and has adequate moisture supply from stored soil moisture. Neal used Flathead Lake as an example. Specific unique farmland criteria is not already designated as prime, prime if irrigated, statewide or local, within about 1 mile of the lake shore, elevation below about 3,800 feet, soils are not sodium affected, do not have a seasonal water table within 48 inches and slopes are less than 30 percent.

Crop Yields include soil surveys which also include estimates for each soil type, small grains, hay, pasture, forestland tree productivity, cherries, and others. Neal gave some

examples of irrigated yields per ton. He also presented a comparison of local important farmland criteria. Commissioner Rokosch questioned the use of bio fuels and the need for different crop production. Neal replied there may be something in the new farm bill. They do not have cost share programs for that area.

Ravalli County Important Farmland Prime consists of prime farmland if irrigated at 20,000 acres, farmland of statewide importance at 10,000 acres, farmland of local importance at 80,000 acres and acres in soil survey area 382,000 (private land). Neal stated important farmland acres are just an estimate at this time because the update soil survey is not complete. Neal stated the prime farmland if irrigated matches the terraces and inset fans.

Commissioner Thompson asked who determines the local importance. Neal replied individuals apply for the designation through the local NRCS. There are some concerns of it being misused. Commissioner Grandstaff asked if that was why the boilerplate language was in the subdivision. Neal replied it was specified. We are pretty inclusive with less than 25% slopes. You are talking about local importance which is less than 15% slopes.

Farmland Acreages in Montana consist of 607,000 acres of prime farmland, 6,065,000 acres of prime farmland if irrigated, 10,430,000 acres of farmland of statewide importance, 1,350,000 acres of farmland of local importance, 16,500 acres of farmland of unique importance, 18,468,500 acres of total important farmland and 94,050,000 acres of total land in Montana.

Neal stated his agency would not be involved with site specific soil designations for subdivision review. He discussed the ph levels in soil and sodium and how it is used to classify soils of prime farmland.

Beth stated the Bitterroot Valley was one of the first areas soil mapped because of the apple production. Discussion followed regarding infrastructures on prime farmland.

Renee asked about using the local important classification to identify an impact in order to get a developer to contribute to the Open Lands Program. She stated she has heard today Neal replied he would recommend using a different type of criteria in order to preserve open land and mitigation for Open Lands Program. Commissioner Grandstaff asked what other criteria exists? Neal stated to expand the statewide or local a little bit of soils properties. It was suggested to have NRCS to work with the Conservation District to hone the subdivision criteria in be able to include soils of local importance. Neal suggested getting someone to do site specific soil evaluations for subdivision reviews.

Bill Burnett questioned a letter stating the criteria must not be used for land development. Commissioner Thompson read the letter to the Board. Bill replied it is going too far in the wrong direction. Further discussion followed regarding the use of farmland of local importance in the subdivision process. Commissioner Rokosch stated it is an opportunity to incorporate local importance in the subdivision criteria. Jay stated in order to use it in

subdivision review criteria it is going to be a costly process with the classification. Commissioner Chilcott asked for clarification of what is trying to be mitigated such as soil components. Commissioner Grandstaff replied she agrees with Commissioner Chilcott. There was one instance where a development was approved with the belief of limited soils only to see the same developer selling viable top soil. Board discussion followed regarding the use of local importance versus statewide and prime as the use of the criteria in the subdivision review process.

The Board thanked Neal, Jay and Beth for their time and the information presented.